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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0112
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 0440
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGUI 000080

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
LONDON FOR PLORD
AFRICOM FOR KOCH

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CT](#)
SUBJECT: A STATE OF DECAY

REF: (09 BANGUI 56, 60, 62)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: From all corners of Central African society and the international community, there is a creeping sense that the Bozize government is increasingly feeble and may not last out the year. Post stresses that it has no/no solid evidence of any credible external or internal threat and everything that we are hearing may simply be a noxious combination of despair on the part of friends of the regime and wishful thinking on the part of its enemies; this telegram must not/not be interpreted as a warning of any imminent event. END SUMMARY

RUMORS ABOUND - Facts are scarce

¶2. (SBU) Recently, Post has begun to hear rumors of impending trouble for the government from a variety of people. Though generally vague in nature and substance, the diversity of sources is disconcerting enough to merit reporting. Sources have included [STRICTLY PROTECT ALL] the FOMUC second in command, a former vice minister and CAR Ambassador, several expatriate businesspeople (30 year veterans in the CAR), and Post's FSNI who says that 'feelings of 2003 are in the air' [Note: 2003 was the year Bozize overthrew former President Ange-Felix Patasse]. A French Embassy development official told POLOFF that he is, 'happy the French army is at the airport'.

THE PLAYERS

¶3. (SBU) The last thirty years have been a steady downward slide and real development has been almost nonexistent. A few examples:

- 80% of Central Africans live on less than one dollar a day,
- One in five children die before their fifth birthday, and,
- Life expectancy is 44 years of age.

Not surprisingly, frustration with the government is very high and does sometimes flair into violence (09 BANGUI 60). Popular frustration at the lack of electricity, water, and medical attention, coupled with violent crime and the impunity of the

Presidential Guard could still trigger a serious popular uprising. But, POLOFF has been told a number of times that with all the hardships facing Central Africans, rising up against the government is not worth the risk to life and limb ('they have guns, we have nothing!'). Still, while all of these are not new realities in the CAR, Post believes that the majority of people are willing to wait for elections. For, despite the fact that Bozize's blatant corruption and misrule is obvious to all but the most diehard members of his clan, he has been able to portray himself as a force for stability. This is seen as an acceptable alternative to the anarchy of another coup, considering that the excesses of previous ones are still fresh in the minds of Central Africans.

14. (SBU) The conventional wisdom in Bangui today is that the armed opposition (known locally as the 'politico-military groups') is incapable of posing any real threat to the Bozize government. The rebellions in the north, though devastating to life there, are nothing more than a nuisance to daily life in Bangui. Central African politics have always been shaped by powerful men rather than societal forces and the CAR's five rebel groups are prime examples. Lacking any clear political objectives, the groups are almost all personality driven and some appear to be the pawns of foreign powers. While they give lip service to ending the abuses of the CARG, the groups command little real popular or regional support. Foreign observers (and many Central Africans) note that the game is simple - if you do not get the post you want in the government, you form a rebel group, grab some territory to control (and 'tax'), and wait to be paid off as a condition of signing a peace accord (It is not unheard of to receive the payment and then take up arms a second time to get more). There is thus little indication that any rebel force, as presently constituted, has the immediate ability

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or desire to actually march on Bangui unless robustly supported by an external power. Both Presidents Qadhafi and Deby have displayed their unhappiness with Bozize of late (09 BANGUI 56, 62) through support of rebel groups and one embassy source recently went so far as to say, 'They are tired of Bozize. He should not have lasted this long,' but Post has no/no information to confirm that they have any interest in seeing the Bozize government actually fall.

15. (SBU) The military, though frustrated, is not likely to lead a power grab. A well regarded colonel recently informed POLOFF that, 'the leadership of this country lacks all political conviction and will'. Clearly frustrated, the colonel complained to POLOFF about the lack of funding for the military, noting that the Armed Forces of Central Africa (FACA) have not recruited new enlisted men since 2006 or fired ammunition in training since 2005. The FACA, according to President Bozize's son, the Minstre Delege (Vice Minister) of Defense (PROTECT), is suffering from an AIDS rate of 30 per cent and is so ill equipped that there are more company sized detachments in the Army than working vehicles to transport them. Overall, there appears to be an intentional decision by President Bozize who, though titled as Minister of Defense and Commander of the Army, fears the threat it poses to his regime and prefers it to be weak. Bozize, like the Emperor Bokassa before him, depends heavily on the Presidential (formerly Imperial) Guard, or 'GP'. The GP is made up of close members of Bozize's clan with a healthy leavening of Chadian mercenaries, also known as the former 'Liberators'. They have two very different functions: the first is to serve as physical protection of the President, and the second is to serve as a strike force to reinforce the FACA in the provinces. (Many reports of the burning of villages or the killing of civilians specify that the actions were committed by the GP and not the FACA.) The FACA, whose estimated combat strength is 1,300 [Note: according to the FACA Chief of Staff, the total strength of the army is 5,000, but only a fifth are capable of combat operations], is dispersed throughout the country in anti-rebel and anti-poaching operations and therefore appears logistically incapable of being the core of a push against the CARG.

¶6. (SBU) There is always a possibility that the threat to the CARG might come from within. The recent death of Bozize's mother, a matriarch of the clan, may mean that power dynamics are changing. A possible threat to Bozize is his nephew and Minister of Mines, Sylvain Ndoutingai. The money man of the regime, Ndoutingai is reportedly in control of the praetorian Presidential Guard. A former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs [PROTECT SOURCE] told the Ambassador, 'He would love to overthrow Bozize, he told me so'. But Ndoutingai is still young and deeply unpopular among the population. Although this does not preclude him from attempting to seize power, he would most likely bide his time until he has consolidated his position further or Bozize loses the confidence of their clan. At this time, other candidates within the Bozize power structure that may make a push for power are hard to identify, but may very well exist. It is interesting that RUMINT has it that Bozize's people have distributed weapons to youths in Bangui neighborhoods considered loyal to him as an insurance policy in case of a move against him.

STEPS BY POST

¶7. (SBU) Confrontations in Bangui have always been violent thus Post is taking several precautionary measures.

-- On March 11, 2009, the Ambassador hosted a Town Hall Meeting at his residence where AmCits were informed of Post's emergency plans. CA recently published a new Travel Warning dated April 3, 2009, recommending against all but essential travel outside Bangui. Post has ordered extra radios for its designated wardens and is in the process of setting up an SMS warden notification system.

-- Post recently dug emergency wells at the CMR and has ordered sufficient food (MRE) for 100 people for two weeks.

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Additionally, Post stays in close contact with the French embassy concerning their planning and opinions on the current situation. (If the French development official is 'happy' that there are French troops at the airport, Post is 'unhappy' that the French contingent is down to half that which was available the last time that AmEmbassy Bangui had to be evacuated. Specifically, the French no longer have enough troops to hold the airport, airport road, fuel depot, and French chancery compound - they can hold one but not all. Thus all E and E plans are contingent on the arrival of additional troops, most probably from Gabon.)

-- The RSO from Ndjamena is scheduled to visit Post shortly to review our EAP.

WHAT NEXT?

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Post remains vigilant for any signs of further political deterioration. The Ambassador continues to repeat the position of the USG that the CARG is the legitimately elected government of the CAR and any extralegal attempt to change it will be condemned by the USG and the international community. The Central African Republic has never been the paradigm of stability and there has always been a level of political uncertainty. This being said, the uptick of anger with the government and the pessimism surrounding it is worth noting.

Thus, while Post does not/not believe that the government will fall any time soon, it is very possible that over the next year, popular patience may wear thin and provide the opportunity for another figure to emerge. END COMMENT

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